THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI DALBIR SINGH): (a) and (b) No specific target is fixed for opening of branches by nationalised banks during a year. However, nationalised banks have opened 156 branches during 1990-91. As on 31-3-1991, 219 licences were pending with nationalised banks for opening of their branches. The validity period of these licences has been extended upto 31-3-1992. Since the opening of branches of banks is a continuous process, governed by licences issued by RBI, it is not possible to project the number of branches proposed to be opened by nationalised banks during 1991.

Strategy of JCI to prevent the fall of price of raw jute below the minimum level

389. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA : Will the Minister of Textiles be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Jute Corporation of India has started marketing operations to prevent the decline of raw jute price below the minimum level;

(b) whether the Jute Corporation of India also propose to begin commercial purchases of the raw jute; and

(c) if not, what are the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF TEXTILES (SHRI ASHOK GEHLOT): (a) to (c). Jute Corporation of India Ltd. (JCI) is required to conduct price support operations in the eventuality of fall in prices of raw jute below minimum support levels. The prices of raw jute have, so far, ruled above the minimum support levels during the current season. However, the field machinery of JCI has been kept in readiness to commence price support operations if the need for it were to arise. JCI also undertakes commercial purchases of raw jute on the basis of firm indents. However, such purchases are effected at the opportune time in exercise of its commercial judgement. JCI has recently been provided with some funds for this purpose.

Gold smuggling across Bangladesh border

390. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there are reports of gold smuggling along the Bangladesh borders; and

(b) if so, what steps are being taken to prevent the same ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI RAMESHWAR THAKUR): (a) Available reports indicate that gold continues to be sensitive to smuggling along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

(b) The anti-smuggling drive has been intensified and the anti-smuggling machinery throughout the country including those on the Indo-Bangladesh border has been geared up. Close co-ordination is being maintained between all the agencies concerned in the detection and prevention of smuggling. The Customs Officers have been equipped with vehicles, fire arms, night vision binoculars etc.for combating smuggling activities more effectively. A telecommunication network has also been provided to the field formations along Indo-Bangladesh border.

Contaminated Basmati Rice exported by Pepsi Foods to USA

391. SHRI DIPEN GHOSH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news report captioned "Many Indian export consignments detained in U.S." which appeared in "The Hindu" of the 24th July, 1991;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that "Basmati" rice exported by M/s. Pepsi Foods

has been found to be contaminated with insect and rodent filth by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration;

(c) whether it is also a fact that the Basmati rice exported by M/s. Pepsi Foods was not processed by it in any of its manufacturing factories;

(d) whether these products of Pepsi Foods have been inspected and cleared by APEDA and the inspection agencies;

(e) whether the entire shipment of rice by Pepsi Foods has been detained by U.S. Food and Drug Administration; and

(f) what action Government propose to take against Pepsi Foods in this regard?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) to (f) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Fraud in London branch of Central Bank of India

392. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a retired Deputy General Manager and others of the London branch of the Central Bank of India have been chargesheeted in a related case of the biggest bank fraud of Rs. 750/- crore;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) when the fraud was detected and whether all those involved have been arrested and chargesheeted; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI DALBIR SINGH): (a) to (d) Information is being collected and to the extent possible, will be laid on the Table of the House.

Damodar River Polluted by Industrial Effluents

393. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Damodar river and its tributories have been polluted by the industrial effluents;

(b) whether it is also a fact that 25 thousand square kilometer land area of Bihar have become unfertile as a result thereof and irrigation, drinking water have also been adversely affected; and

(c) if so, what corrective measures are being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government has not received any information that 25 thousand square kilometer land area of Bihar has become unfertile directly due to discharge of industrial effluents but there have been reports of need for soil conservation and checking of silt in the valley. However, the water of Damodar River is unfit for drinking without treatment.

(c) In order to abate the pollution of the Damodar River the following steps have been taken:

(i) The Central Pollution Control Board is co-ordinating wtih the state Governments of Bihar and West Bengal, measures to monitor river quality.

(ii) Water quality monitoring stations have been set up by the State Board for the Damodar River.

(iii) The State Government of Bihar has issued directions under Environment Protection Act, 1986 to the Bokaro Thermal Power Station of DVC, Kathora Washeries, Dugdha Washeries West Bokaro Collieries and IEL Gomia. Cases under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974